

# DISPATCHES™

Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

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## THE (POSITIONING) MATRIX--RELOADED

One of our favorite “how-to-think” brand-building tools is one we created over twenty years ago: The Positioning Matrix. It’s a tool that has unlimited applications and when completed in a disciplined manner, portrays a helpful snapshot of current marketplace reality that is much easier to understand than any movie about a simulated reality

For sure, crafting a unique brand positioning requires deep “spade work” and a fair amount of creativity—within *each* of the six elements of a brand positioning statement. But being unique doesn’t necessarily mean being competitive, which should be the goal for any brand positioning. How can you know, really, how competitive your brand’s positioning is without (as noted above) “cross-checking” the *inferred positionings* of your key competitors?

This notion of “cross-checking” (what good pilots do constantly with their various aircraft instruments, to keep the plane headed in the right direction) should be taken literally...because the very best way to size up the competitiveness of *your* brand’s positioning is to lay it out right next to those of your competition. As you can see in the matrix below, this laying out of positioning statements is nothing more than a build on the basic structure of a classic brand positioning statement—a format twist to display your thinking:

**POSITIONING MATRIX**

BRAND	TARGET GROUP	CONSUMER NEEDS	COMPETITIVE FRAME	BENEFIT	REASON-WHY	BRAND CHARACTER
Your Brand	Demo/ Psycho:  Usage:		Brand of:  Competing With:			
Competitor	Demo// Psycho:  Usage:		Brand of:  Competing With:			
Competitor	Demo/ Psycho:  Usage:		Brand of:  Competing With:			

The simplicity of this displayed thinking, matrix tool is evident, but once each square is filled in, the matrix becomes a highly analytical tool as well. Of course, the value of any analysis you do with the matrix is directly proportional to the validity of the square inputs. Completing the matrix squares for your own brand should be the easy part, assuming you already have built your own brand positioning. Here are some pointers for the more difficult part—inferring the brand positioning statement (in bullet-point fashion) for each of your key competitors:

- *Assemble a varied team of colleagues whose opinions you value and trust (from your creative agencies, from other category brands within the Company, from R&D, from Consumer Intelligence, etc.).*
- *Also assemble as many consumer/customer “touch-points” for each competitive brand as possible: packaging, package inserts, advertising, selling materials, website pages, promotional materials, product (!) and so on.*
- *Spend the better part of a day having these multi-functional team members complete their inferred take on what each competitor’s brand positioning is.*
- *Pull together a consensus positioning statement*

Once you have consensus positioning statements for your key competitors, it’s a good idea to put them aside for a few days, let them “incubate” so to speak, and then look at them again with fresh eyes (and maybe even with the those of other colleagues, who didn’t take part in the consensus build-up). Now you’re ready for the analytical work—trying to objectively assess which brand in the category or class has the most competitive positioning platform.

This assessment requires at least two phases: the *judgment phase* and the *check-out* phase. In the judgment phase, you’re still relying on intuition (as well as on any inside knowledge you may have regarding the strengths and weaknesses of your category). In the check-out phase, you’re confirming and amending the collective judgments by hearing from category users—preferable loyal or regular users of each brand, who typically have the best grasp of their brand’s current positioning.

Over the years of assembling many positioning matrices with our clients, we have found that the most challenging aspect of the ensuing analysis is in laying aside your natural biases and *objectively* assessing your competitors’ brand positionings. Somehow we can always see the errors of our enemies’ ways, but we have a much tougher time acknowledging shortcomings of our own. Maybe you’ve heard the occasional marketer say something like this about their number one competitor: “We hope they keep doing what they’re doing because they are really screwing up.” To help avoid natural biases like these we think it’s a good idea to assume—if only for the sake of argument—that your brand positioning is not currently the best, strongest, or most competitive in the category (a kind of devil’s advocate posture).

Once you've done this, here are the steps we recommend to quickly get into the matrix and decipher its points of strength and weakness:

1. **Use the “5 C’s” Checklist** against each inferred positioning. This will enable you to determine how well each holds up *technically* on Clarity, Completeness, Cohesiveness, Competitiveness, and Choice-Fullness. By way of review, here again is our synopsis of the “5 C’s of Technical Competence”:

**CLEAR**—language is incapable of being misunderstood

**COMPLETE**—contains all essential elements and parts

**COMPETITIVE**—expresses differentiation; creates preference

**COHESIVE**—all the parts are well-linked

**CHOICE-FULL**—it’s single-minded; not all things to all people

2. **Check the “Natural Pairs”** to see how well each acts as sides of the same coin. These pairs, which reflect off one another, include: Needs & Benefits, Benefits & Reasons Why, and Target & Brand Character.
3. **Identify Where Differentiation Lies**—in which of the squares does a brand offer a real or perceived, meaningful difference (relative to its chosen Target, that is)?
4. **Judge Which Positioning Appears Most Competitive**...and then take a shot at articulating the implications for your brand (even if your brand is judged the most competitive)

## BOATS & HELICOPTERS

1. Once you're satisfied that you have a solid brand positioning for your brand, put it to the acid test by comparing it to your key competitor's inferred positionings. To infer these, start by collecting as many of the consumer (or for drug brands, customer) “touch-points” as you can: packaging, package inserts, advertising, selling materials, website pages, promotional materials, product (!), and so on. Using these as stimulus, work with your multi-functional team brand team to infer the competitor's intended brand positioning statements.
2. As a team, use the “5 C’s of Technical Competence” to conduct a first analysis of how *technically* sound each competitor's positioning is. As part of this, also check for the “natural pairs” within each positioning: Needs & Benefits, Benefits & Reasons Why, and Target & Brand Character. These pairs should link together in an almost seamless way.

Finally, run a “differentiation” check on each element of the competitive brand positionings: in which squares does the brand offer a real or perceived point-of-difference (relative to its chosen Target, of course)?

3. Be creative in your use of the matrix format! It can be arranged to show different geographic positionings, different Target-constituency positionings, and for drug brands, different indications under the same brand.
4. If your brand either houses or is part of a “mega-brand,” work with the full internal team to lay out a Portfolio Brand Positioning Matrix. This, then, becomes the “family portrait” that demonstrates why and how certain line extensions, sub-brands, and sub-lines are logically and strategically part of the same parent or mega-brand. And it serves as the on-going “direction-finder” as the parent considers what new items to add to the brand.

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